

Meeting Recap: Sept. 9, 2014
Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District Advisory Committee

Attendees: Mike, Stephanie, Laurie, Suzan, Ida and Theresa

The Blairs Redevelopment: Sri Velamati, Vice President – Development, The Tower Companies

Sri Velamati's presentation concentrated on Phase 1 of the project to redevelop the Blairs, Preliminary plans for this section, which is a 32-acre parcel along Eastern Avenue, have been filed. The mid-rise apartments in this section will be demolished and be replaced by new apartment buildings and open space. The Tower Companies are working with the Baltimore-based Design Collective, landscape architects for the planned renovation of the National Mall, and Sasaki.

Note: If you did not attend the meeting, you can view the presentation at http://issuu.com/reembertorodriguez/docs/blairsf1f2-v3.9_art_2

The plan is to shift the focus of the entire development away from cars and make the area pedestrian friendly—turning parking into parks, as Velamati called it. The resident population eventually will grow from about 2,500 to 6,000 residents. Most parking for these people and patrons of the planned retail and offices will be underground.

The development will feature a large, walkable, open space, something like a spine, that will connect Eastern Avenue and East-West highway. It will include spaces for festivals and other events and entertainment designed to complement, not compete with, current activities in the downtown. There will be a number of resident-focused open space, such as fitness parks, volleyball courts and two dog parks, much of which will also be open to the public.

There are six major public art elements, all planned for later stages of the project. These include a landmark kinetic entrance piece on the East-West side, special paving, lighting displays, a tunnel that will also serve for storm water management, art that doubles as playground equipment, and a sculptural bridge on the D.C. side of the development. These will be included in the site plan for the second phase and will go through the public art review process. In addition, the developers are looking at including some flexible space for an arts-oriented group (or groups).

Follow up: None needed at this time.

Elizabeth Square Project: Bruce Lee, President, Lee Development Group; Christopher Donald, Housing Acquisition Manager, Real Estate Development, Housing Opportunities Commission; Mel Tull, Lee Development; Susan Reutershan, Lerch Early & Brewer.

After a brief introduction by Bruce Lee, Chris Donald did the presentation for this project

proposal. A copy of the presentation is included with the email sent to share this summary with the full committee.

The project would tear down an existing Lee-owned two-story office park on Fenwick behind the Elizabeth House, a 16-story, 160-unit affordable housing building on the corner of Fenwick and Second Avenue. In its place, Phase I would construct 277 units of senior housing in 15 stories with a public recreational indoor pool, senior wellness center operated by Holy Cross Hospital, bistro kitchen, flex room and art display area.

The existing Elizabeth House residents would be moved into the Phase 1 building. Elizabeth House would then be torn down and replaced with a 19-story building containing 319 units with a neighborhood-oriented café, 15 live/work artist studios, a resource center and an audio/visual center. The entire new complex would include four gallery spaces and the existing public art on the property would be relocated. Opening up new entrances to the courtyard would make the space and art more accessible to the general public.

In the meantime, Alexander House's 312 units would be completely renovated. The partnership is just starting the site plan process with an eye to breaking ground for Phase 1 in the first quarter of 2016; renovations on Alexander House could begin in mid-2015.

Follow up: A letter of support was requested from the committee. With no objections, Mike will draft and circulate to the committee.

2014-2015 Priorities and Projects

Mike shared the results of the ranking from members thus far (seven weighed in). The full list is included with the email sent to share this summary with the full committee.

The two top choices were expanding the committee and "build capacity with a dedicated revenue stream to effectively manage marketing and execution of large-scale, public, free hospitality zone-wide events and initiatives." In the weighted scoring system used to evaluate the results, both of these choices received 16 points.

Increasing funding for Business Improvement Districts and Urban Districts was the third choice with 12 points, followed by developing a busker program (11 points) and developing a public art master plan (9 points).

Due to time constraints, discussion was limited and centered mostly on the busker program, currently being worked on by Dan Hoffman and Reemberto. However, woven through the entire discussion was the issue of funding for any initiatives, or lack of it, indicating members' concerns about that issue. In addition, Theresa suggested breaking these projects into short-term and long action items, a suggestion that was generally well received.

Follow up: Mike will check with Dan and Ana Van Balen, lead county staff for the Nighttime Economy Task Force, to get an update on what's happening with the NETF recommendations and report back to the committee. Further discussion will be needed at the November meeting.

UPDATE: Each department involved in the recommendations has provided Ana with an initial response regarding what it would take to implement each of the recommendations. That information has not been presented yet to the county executive, who ultimately would have to decide how he wants to proceed.

Other business: Elizabeth Gallauresi showed some of the new photos of downtown Silver Spring taken over the summer by a professional photographer. These will be used for promotion and other purposes, replacing the collection shot in 2002.

Reemberto is checking on the status of current committee members and will report in November.

Next meeting: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 11, Silver Spring Civic Building. Tentative agenda items include a presentation about a new development at the corner of Colesville and East-West Highway (where Einstein Bagels, FedEx, etc. are located) and further discussion of the proposed projects and priorities.